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Bush and Cocaine

Six months ago a CounterPuncher in whom we have absolute confidence relayed to us a conversation he had just had with someone who had attended Yale at the same time as George W. Bush in the early 1970s. The Yale man told our CounterPuncher of his direct knowledge of young Bush selling cocaine in his college years. The Yale man adamantly refused to go on the record, on the grounds that he had no desire to authenticate a story that could only damage Bush's chances in the race for the presidency this year.

We relay the story now to our readers because we have been reliably informed that a New York Times investigative team digging into George W. Bush's relationship to cocaine has unearthed a similar story of young George W. using cocaine in bars and dealing cocaine out of a house in New Haven. But, as yet, the Times's investigators have been unable to get anyone to go on the record.

As the presidential campaign heads into its final stretch CounterPunch has been disgusted, though not particularly surprised, by the gentle handling the press has given both Bush and Al Gore on the matter of drug use. Bush's refusal to give any direct answer on his relationship to cocaine before 1974 is a matter of record. This can only mean that he has something to hide; that he fears that a categorical denial could be refuted by someone with knowledge of his activities relating to cocaine.

The attitude of the press is that "nothing new" has emerged to justify any reprise of the Bush/cocaine stories. Nothing new? Not a day passes in the nation's courts but that a non-violent drug offender is put behind bars for cocaine possession, either for use or for sale or both. Yet here is the governor of Texas, seeking to lead a nation cursed by a "war on drugs", refusing to address questions about cocaine in his own past.

Al Gore has grudgingly conceded use of marijuana in the 1970s. The prime source for the drug habits both of Gore and his wife Tipper is John Warnecke, their supplier at the time, who has stated that at that time in Nashville Gore smoked as much marijuana as anyone he knew, including opium-coated Thai sticks. We have heard stories, though devoid of the same categorical eye-witness certainty of the Yale informant, of Gore's continued enjoyment of marijuana in later years after he entered Congress. Today Gore reiterates his support for the war on drugs and declares that imprisoned offenders should not be released until they test clean.

There have been many destructive campaigns by US governments, both Republican and Democrat, but only a few with more terrible consequences than the war on drugs. At home this war has been aimed primarily at the poor and most of all against black people. It is a war that has kicked aside constitutional protections and crammed our prisons. Abroad the war is a rationale for counter-insurgency.

Today the Taliban, installed with CIA backing, now rule Afghanistan as the world's leading supplier of heroin and morphine to the west. The Colombian military, flush with a billion in aid from the Clinton administration, make war on desperate peasants with nothing but coca and opium cultivation between them and starvation.

No inconvenient questions about the drug war or any personal relationship with drugs by either candidate have perturbed the decorum of the debates. Jim Lehrer didn't ask George W. Bush about cocaine or Al Gore about marijuana. Yet Bush has been posturing about a crusade to restore moral honor to the Oval Office and Gore about "personal responsibility". We await with interest the ultimate editorial decision of the New York Times. CP

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Our Little Secrets

The Only Hope

Watching those two addlepates jabbering nervously in the debates, isn't it clear that America's life line has to be Dick Cheney? He ran the country for our greatest president, Jerry Ford. He can run it again for George W. Bush, who makes Ford look like Frederick the Great.

Amid all the prattle about the "Bush bounce" and bumbling Gore we don't think people have focused with quite the requisite stunned reproof on the scarcely credible stupidity and moral crassness of both the vice president of the United States and the governor of Texas. A friend of ours, watching the second "debate" with a White House staffer, listened to the bellows of James Carville coming out of the speaker phone. "Did you ever see three such fucking morons in all your life," Carville screamed. He was right.

As combat-weary authors who spent the summer writing a a book about Al Gore, we can say that the veep's pathetic performance in these final weeks is a vindication of every line in our political biography, Al Gore: A User's Manual. Every decent politician has a core persona that surfaces when the going gets rough. It's what people look for in these debates. How will the guy hold up under pressure? In Bill Clinton the people found and admired the tireless effrontery of a backdoor man hopping down the alley with his trousers round his ankles, shouting a sermon about the joys of wedded love over his shoulder. The man had staying power, so the people stayed with him.

Gore's never had staying power. He's a whiner. Fifty-two years old and he still doesn't know who he is. He's not a leader, because he's never truly sure – until the next focus group – where he should lead the people, or where the people want him to go. All his life Gore has been "finding" himself, pouncing hopefully upon defining moments, exploiting "epiphanies" like his sister's death or his son's accident.

When he got back from his brief, safe tour in Vietnam he offered various essays in self knowledge: that he had seen the heart of darkness, an experience so shattering that he vowed that "I'm going to divinity school to atone for my sins." To others he presented a more robust account, saying his only regret was he wasn't returning to Vietnam for a second tour. Yet another version had him acquiring post-radical enlightenment, that he had realised the greatness of America's moral mission, that there were people in South Vietnam "who desperately wanted the US to win and to keep them away from this loss of freedom."

Against all this an Army colleague, Bob Delabar offered a persuasive account of Gore and his buddies drinking Budweiser, smoking high-powered dope and playing basketball. "I think he'd say," Delabar recalls, "he had a lot of fun in Vietnam." Of course this was the one thing Gore never fessed up to.

Gore's internal radio is always on scan, searching for the right frequency. It's why he seems inert so much of the time. He's trying to figure out who he should be. Every student of Al Jr. encounters the "woodenness" factor. It's not so mysterious. Al Gore has been watching his act almost as long as he's been alive. Youthful rebellion was never a part of his psychic c.v. Even his mother described him as "fairly much a conformist". She also said, "Al was an easy child, very sensitive to our feelings. He wanted to do what we wanted him to do... Al never wanted to be the person to make an unhappy noise." To the sermons and injunctions of his father, worthy of Polonius in their earnest protraction, Al Jr. invariably lent a dutiful ear.

Listen to how his classmates at St. Albans remember Al Jr: "a stuffed shirt, even as a kid", "too well behaved", "too grown up", "excessively competitive", with "no sense of play", living "in a world of his own", "not a risk taker". Pitiless as schoolboys often are, they put under Gore's entries in the yearbook "a wooden Apollo", "Ozymandias" and the yearbook editors affixed beneath his photo a quote from Anatole France, "People without weaknesses are terrible".

Albert Sr. said in 1992 that he had carefully blended the two worlds of DC and Carthage, inculcating in Al "the rural influences and political society". Chores around the farm? It was not enough to paint a picket fence. Albert Sr. devised purgatorial tests for his son, planting tobacco, slopping hogs and forcing the poor lad to plow a hillside with a horse team. When even Pauline questioned the exhausting regime, Albert Sr. loftily replied, "I think a boy, to achieve anything he wants to achieve, which would include being president of the United States, ought to be able to run a hillside plough."

Small wonder Al is a psychic cypher. Against him we have another basket case in the form of the moronic George W., product of God knows what WASP repressions of the George H and Barbara household, a man for whom every glance at an atlas engenders baffled amazement at the number of unknown countries within its pages. In that encounter in Winston Salem we confronted the miracle of a candidate who actually made Ronald Reagan sound fluent in his knowledge of the world, a man with a perpetual coke-sniffle breaking into that terrifying psychotic grin when he talked about men being "put to death".

Which brings us back to Cheney. At the present rate a crucial margin of the American people may vote for him, as the last and only hope of a man who might know how to run the country. At least he's run a big oil company, which is more or less the same job. The alternative would be the man they kept out of the debates altogether and even threatened when he tried to get into the debating hall in Boston, Ralph Nader. The people don't want the sanctimonious Lieberman, that's for

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"If Palestinians were black, Israel would now be a pariah state subject to economic sanctions led by the United States."

sure. They know Cheney's been around the track, know that he was at Ford's elbow when he nominated America's greatest current Supreme Court justice (unless you count Souter), namely John Paul Stephens. Cheney gives Bush the semblance of a historical shadow. Gore can't even bring himself to utter Clinton's name as the Democratic president who presided over economic boom, falling crime rates and all the other good things that supposedly should put Gore over the top. What's the attraction of a man too defensive even to capitalize on success?

Bill's Mid-East Legacy

Meantime Clinton's faults are catching up with him too, on a somewhat larger stage. He's always been one for the phony, cowardly, brokered reconciliation, the win-win solution, the photo-op deal. The defining moment of Clinton's diplomacy was the "handshake" between Rabin and Arafat, offered to the world as the insignia of a decent deal brokered by America. Of course it was nothing of the sort. As Israel's guardian, the United States shoved down Arafat's throat a deal that was bound, in the end, to blow up. What else could one expect of arrangements that saw Israeli settlements relentlessly expand, no right of return for hundreds of thousands of evicted Palestinians, Israeli-Arabs as second class citizens, Palestinian colonies under Israeli army supervision, no capital in Jerusalem. In the end, after years of grovelling, even Arafat had to say No.

Here's how the London Observer put it in an editorial ("A True Palestinian State is Essential") October 15, calling on Europe to break with US patronage of Israel:

"If Palestinians were black, Israel would now be a pariah state subject to economic sanctions led by the United States. Its development and settlement of the West Bank would be seen as a system of apartheid, in which the indigenous population was allowed to live in a tiny fraction of its own country, in self-administered 'bantustans', with 'whites' monopolising the supply of water and electricity. And just as the black population was allowed into South Africa's white areas in disgracefully under-resourced townships, so Israel's treatment of Israeli Arabs - flagrantly discriminating against them in housing and education spending - would be recognised as scandalous too...

"The Oslo accords built in an overwhelming Israeli territorial advantage in the West Bank, and inevitably turned Arafat into a compromised leader. He is caught between an intransigent negotiating partner and a sullen, suspicious population over whom he has little direct control - a stooge created by Israeli policy and sustained by it. And all the while Israeli settlers extend their settlements in the West Bank. There is and never can be any long-term legitimacy for the Israeli state in the Middle East as long as this process continues."

There'll probably be another phony patch-up, amid calls for even handedness and concessions "on both sides". The actual balance in concessions is reflected rather more accurately in the death rate after Sharon's provocation, nearly a hundred Palestinians, two Israelis.

Sen. Grams' Demon Seed

For Minnesota Senator Rod Grams, a perennial toast of such groups as the American Conservative Union and the Christian Coalition—which recently proclaimed him "a solid voice for pro-family issues"—September was one bad month. On the 24th Grams's 22-year-old son, Morgan, pitched himself out the third-story window of a Super 8 motel in Las Cruces, NM, in a vain effort to elude sheriff's deputies who'd tracked him there. Grams the Younger was taken into custody along with an 18-year-old friend and the 15-year-old runaway girl they had brought along with them on a four-day joyride that started in Minnesota; he was subsequently charged with three felony counts of theft for stealing a shotgun, a Chevy Blazer, and $2,500 worth of silver and antique coins.

Over the past couple of years Morgan Grams has made headlines in Minnesota more often than his father, a former TV newscaster and notorious back-bencher whose sponsorship of legislation is usually confined to commemorative proclamations and "sense of the Senate" resolutions. (One notable exception: When the racist disparity between crack and powder cocaine sentencing guidelines became a public issue, Grams successfully co-sponsored a bill to remedy it—by raising the penalties for powder.) In July 1999, Rod Grams telephoned the sheriff's office in Anoka County, Minnesota, to ask their assistance in finding his son, who had disappeared with a rental vehicle borrowed from a co-worker several days earlier. A deputy duly located Morgan Grams in the company of his merry band. He would subsequently report finding nothing amiss with the vehicle or its occupants.

The incident might never have made the papers if two other deputies had not arrived at the scene a couple of minutes after the first deputy. One of them saw a Grams passenger stuffing something in the waistband of his pants. It was one of nine bags of pot the youth proved to have in his possession; a tenth was discovered under Grams's seat. There were also several empty beer cans in the vehicle, according to the accounts of a passenger and the man from whom Grams had taken the car. All Grams got from the deputy was a front-seat ride back to his motel, but he was not so lucky two weeks later when he stole a car and a purse from a woman he had taken to a suburban Twin Cities bar. That stunt landed him on probation, which he subsequently violated by failing to show up for a court-mandated drug test. He was wanted on a skip warrant at the time of his New Mexico arrest.

Following his son's latest apprehension, a tearful Rod Grams met the press to offer assurances that, unlike last time, Morgan would have to face the music. But at least his travails with his son pushed into the background another family-related September scandal. Earlier in the month the Minneapolis Star Tribune published a report indicating that a series of anonymous smear emails about Mike Ciresi, a candidate in the state's Democratic Senate primary appear to have originated with the Grams campaign's political director, Christine Gunhus. If true, this bit of political dirty trickery would also be illegal under Minnesota campaign law. Gunhus has been a key Grams operative since his 1992 election to the House; more recently she was the chief of staff in his Senate office before departing to head his campaign. The family connection? Last year Roll Call identified her as the girlfriend of Grams, who divorced his wife in 1994. CP

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Neel, Chagnon and the Yanomami

Darkness in El Dorado

Madam President,... We write to in form you of an impending scan dal that will affect the American Anthropological profession... In its scale, ramifications, and sheer criminality and corruption it is unparalleled in the history of Anthropology."

Thus begins a recent e-mail from two distinguished anthropologists, Professors Terry Turner of Cornell and Leslie Sponsel of the University of Hawai'i, to Louise Lamphere, president of the American Anthropological Association. The man primarily accused of these crimes, a geneticist named James Neel, died last February. The charges are made by reporter Patrick Tierney in his book Darkness in El Dorado, scheduled for publication next month by Norton.

Neel worked for a covert program of the Atomic Energy Commission to study the effects of radiation on human subjects and to see how human groups behaved under conditions of extreme stress. Neel had ubermensch notions about the genetics of "leadership" and differential rates of reproduction among dominant and sub-dominant males in a genetically "isolated" human population. The AEC was happy to pick up the tab, no doubt eager to find out how any survivor group of carefully selected Americans secluded in caves during nuclear Armageddon would survive and breed in the aftermath.

"Tierney presents convincing evidence," write the aghast anthropologists Turner and Sponsel that on his 1968 trip to the Yanomami, a tribe in the Venezuelan Amazon, Neel greatly exacerbated, and probably started, the epidemic of measles that killed 'hundreds, perhaps thousands' (Tierney's language-the exact figure will never be known) of Yanomami." It seems that the epidemic was "caused, or at least worsened and more widely spread, by a campaign of vaccination carried out by the research team, which used a virulent vaccine (Edmonson B) that had been counter-indicated by medical experts for use on isolated populations with no prior exposure to measles (exactly the Yanomami situation)."

Thus, according to Tierney, who spent ten years researching this history, Neel secretly supervised a program of potentially lethal injections. Then he instructed the members of his research team to refuse to provide any medical assistance to the sick and dying Yanomami, Neel said that as men of science they should not intervene. He apparently believed that before the rise of mass societies, first in agricultural communities and then in cities, small genetically isolated groups would produce leaders with dominant genes who would then appropriate a big share of the available women with whom they would breed, thus constantly upgrading the genetic stock of the tribe.

But his theory faced a big problem, namely the vulnerability of such small groups to diseases and consequent epidemics imported from the outside world , which the large groups in modern mass society could more easily absorb.

Hence Neel's terrible experiments on the Yanomami, in a kind of grim downgrade of the Malthusian ethics of "Survivor". He wanted to disprove the vulnerability of small, isolated groups to epidemics, seeking to show that though a disease such as measles might wreak awful havoc, his alpha-dominated males would be better adapted to evolve genetic immunity to these "contact" diseases. Many might die but the survivors would be of ever more superior stock.

"Neel greatly exacerbated, and probably started, the epidemic of measles that killed 'hundreds, perhaps thousands'... of Yanomami."

In their letter to the head of the Anthropological Association Turner and his colleague Sponsel write carefully that "Tierney's well-documented account, in its entirety, strongly supports the conclusion that the epidemic was in all probabilty deliberately caused as an experiment designed to produce scientific support for Neel's eugenic theory."

Neel also allegedly colluded with Venezuelan politicians attempting to gain control of Yanomami lands for illegal gold mining concessions. He provided "cover" for the illegal mine developer as a "naturalist" collaborating with the anthropological researchers, in exchange for the politician's guarantee of continued access to the Indians for the anthropologists.

It's not surprising that Neel should have approved of the work of Napoleon Chagnon and welcomed him as an associate. For decades, in work such as The Fierce People Chagnon has been promoting a version of Yanomami society in which aggressive alpha males appropriate all desirable women and slaughter the weak, to the great delight of sociobiologists who have revelled in Chagon's fictions as proof of their own gloomy views of the human condition. The simplest explanation of why the Yanomami were "fierce" is because they quite rightly couldn't stand Chagnon. See the compelling eyewitness account of Leslie Baer on page 5.

Tierney devotes much of the book to a critique of Napoleon Chagnon's work, charging that Chagnon has cooked his research, not least by repeatedly fomenting the internecine wars which he invokes as evidence of the ultimately healthful genetic purging by which the Yanomami survive.

On Tierney's account of it, there's nothing here that separates Neel from the Nazi doctors, and ghastly though the whole story is, there's little that should excessively surprise anyone who has looked at the practical functions of anthropology as a handservant of Empire. Anthropologists often served as spies for the colonial authorities, as many native peoples correctly surmised.

E. Evans-Pritchard, whose study of the African Nuer tribe is regarded as a classic of social anthropology, interrupted a lyrical account of Nuer life to note without comment or reproof the punitive raids of British colonial authorities "including bombing and machine-gunning of camps". Nor did he regard this rending of Nuer society by the British as a topic worthy of inclusion in his description of stresses in Nuer society.

Will Tierney's book provoke the uproar that Turner and Sponsel predict? Will anthropology be placed in the dock? We doubt it. For years native groups across the world with stories of the depredations of anthropologists have been eager to tell them to anyone interested. Few have listened. The can of worms is way too big. CP

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"A Cloud Over My Life"

Destroying A Yanomami Village

By Leslie Baer

As the terrible saga of Neel and Chagnon's dealings with the Yanomami becomes the focus of attention, we have received the following first-hand account of a 1991 expedition to the Yanomami village of Ashidowa-Teri from Leslie Baer, who tells us that "The memory of the events of that expedition has hung like a cloud over my life for nearly a decade. Perhaps my testimony can now serve, in some small way, to assist in putting an end to 'usury' anthropology that disrespects life during the course of studying it."

I was on the expedition to Ashidowa-teri that ended in the helicopter destroying the village. I was almost killed, and was revived by a Yanomami shaman. I was the journalist on the expedition, and had my cameraman film the aftermath of this horrible disaster. Mysteriously, when we arrived home, he told me the images were "lost". I later learned that the Venezuelan military had threatened the cameraman's life.

The Yanomami in Ashidowa-teri were sick and starving when we arrived. I began sharing food with them, and Napoleon Chagnon angrily demanded that I not feed the Yanomami, as it interfered with the blood samples he was having taken for his research. I refused to abide, and shared food anyway.

While irritated with me, Chagnon continued interacting with me since I had interviews yet to conduct with him. The resulting film was "Yanomami: Keepers of the Flame" (co-produced A.R. Vargas/ California State Polytechnic University, Pomona), a positive film about a people struggling to survive. Chagnon did not approve of the film. One reason he expressed was that I used "Yanomami", rather than "Yanomamo", as he always had. This was because "Yanomami" is what the people of that village called themselves. Chagnon also was unhappy with the general "feel" of the film. He told me he did not like the way it portrayed the Yanomami. I didn't understand his complaint at the time, but after re-reading Chagnon's Fierce People several months after the film first aired, came to believe that he objected to the footage of Yanomami daily life which depicted them in ways that were contrary to his published description. I've been told that the film had a humanizing effect; I hope it helped rid the Yanomami of the "fierce" collar in some circles.

In fact, after surpassing my initial fear of the Yanomami after having read Fierce People, I got to know a dozen individuals whom I found to be warm and kind—and sometimes angry and agitated, just like us. When the expedition team first arrived in Ashidowa-teri, a number of villagers offered their hammocks so we would have a place to sleep. In the night, during a torrential rainstorm, I was moved by a family to another place in their sleeping area where the roof wasn't leaking. From their very scarce supply of food, I was offered a parrot breast before any of them had eaten. There were dozens of examples such as this where the Yanomami expressed a genuine concern for my well-being and the well-being of others—absolutely contrary to Chagnon's portrayal of them as perpetually "fierce", uncaring, primitive, uncivilized...perhaps subhuman.

I recall vividly the destruction of the village—the helicopter dropping lower and lower until I was blown down under the creaking canopy of the shabono, which then collapsed with a roar. I regained consciousness to find myself at the center of utter mayhem, a downed village with Yanomami missing. Several of us tried without success to pull back the heavy walls of the shabono in search of any who might be trapped. Luckily, all were accounted for within about 15 minutes of the disaster —- no serious injuries.

I was so distraught that I had an angry discussion with the pilot of the helicopter, and was dragged off by a team member who believed the military would leave us behind if I didn't compose myself. The reason for my outrage was that I was told that the pilot had hovered dangerously low over the village simply so a high ranking military officer on board could "take photos of the savages" to bring back to his children. In the months that followed, I spent many sleepless nights recalling the destruction of that village. The ashes of the dead are of ultimate importance to the Yanomami. They ingest them, and they also keep them (perhaps for generations?) as sacred artifacts. When the helicopter blew down the village, the collapsed walls crushed the baskets that held the ashes. In the aftermath of the destruction of the village, the men and women were seeking out the ashes in the rubble, and in one case I remember clearly, following after them in the wind. They were weeping as they chased them. Many of us wept with them.

The helicopter pulled away not 30 minutes after the disaster, the last of us being hurried aboard without regard for the disaster we had just caused, or for what our responsibility might be in assisting the villagers. In fact, I remember the helicopter being over-full, due both to plant specimens that had been gathered, and due to a "missionized" Yanomami who had joined the expedition after we had landed in the village, and whom we were taking back with us to Caracas. At that point, botanist Charles Brewer and Chagnon selected to leave behind a half-dozen black garbage bags full of refuse —- everything from empty fuel canisters to glass medicine bottles and used syringes. Earlier in the expedition, I had noticed the Yanomami's proclivity to incorporate into their dress our waste objects such as rubber bands and candy wrappers. They commonly made use of our used containers. I cringed to imagine how they might use the fuel canisters, what they might do with the used syringes, and what harm might come to them for the expedition having jettisoned this obviously hazardous waste.

It was a very long, very sad 5-hour ride by helicopter back to Caracas. The memory of this disaster continues to haunt me, and I've found it difficult at times to forgive myself for having been a part of that expedition. May God forgive all of us for the damage we sometimes do when we believe we will help. CP

Napoleon Chagnon angrily demanded that I not feed the Yanomami.

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NOW, Gore and Abortion

By Ellen Johnson

If you ask Patricia Ireland, President of the National Organization of Women (NOW), she would say it's the most important issue facing women this election year. If you ask the feminists staging an anti-NOW demonstration in D.C. later this month, they, too, would claim that abortion rights are serious issues worthy of protection. However, these women and men protesting Ireland's comments in a San Francisco Chronicle article may want to ask NOW's president some other important questions. They might be curious to know when the all inclusive, broad-based feminist organization changed into a single-issue special interest group. Or when NOW's interests became so narrowly defined—to defend abortion rights so vociferously while their candidate of choice, Al Gore, sports an agenda that is so blatantly anti-feminist.

Throughout the summer, Ireland could be heard on C-Span and talk shows murmuring her monotoned mantra: "A vote for Nader is a vote for Bush." By the time the Democrats pulled into LA for their convention, anyone claiming to be a feminist was required to spout this palaver or be branded a card-carrying Buchananite. Criticizing NOW is not an easy thing for me to do. Organized in the early 70s, this grass-roots group was responsible for raising the consciousness of millions of women about sexism, racism and class warfare. However, NOW has always had a public relations problem with some women because of their strong emphasis on abortion rights. Pro-life feminists have never been taken seriously by NOW, forcing many women to the conservative right where their views found a voice.

Although it fiercely supported Anita Hill when she charged Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas with sexual harassment, NOW buried its head in the sand when Clinton admitted engaging in sexual misconduct with an underling. Does NOW's political machine only gear up for a fight when the perpetrator of the offense is a non-Democrat? Situations like this made Green Party member Carol Miller start an ad hoc group in Washington, D.C. to demonstrate disapproval of NOW's' growing list of contradictory positions. The D.C anti-NOW protesters are also reacting to Ireland's comments about third party Presidential candidate Ralph Nader in the September 14 Chronicle piece. Claiming Nader was "ill-informed about abortion rights", Ireland expressed her frustration with Nader's insistence that Bush would not infringe upon Roe vs. Wade.

None of us knows exactly what Bush would do if elected. But we do know what the Clinton/ Gore administration has accomplished in the name of reproductive rights: a perennially stalled bill mandating full insurance coverage for birth control and an eight year ban on research for the abortion pill RU-486. The recent approval of the drug by the FDA may further anaesthetize the NOW Gore-groupies into thinking he's in their corner. The rest of us understand the "eleventh-hour" action as a politically expedient move made by Gore to capitalize on the rhetoric making Bush Enemy #1 to pro-choice women.

What is Roe vs. Wade worth to you, NOW? Is it the wholesale sellout of a constituency you once pledged to serve?

For the sake of argument, let's assume that Gore will be more protective of abortion rights than Bush. Just who benefits from these rights? Impoverished women who can't afford the procedure? Or middle to upper class women? In fact, it was a Democrat-controlled Congress who abolished federal funding for Medicaid abortions in 1978. Under the terms of the Hyde Amendment (for which Al Gore voted), the federal Medicaid program mandates abortion funding only when the woman's life is at stake or in cases of rape and incest; however, since 1994, thirteen states have refused to comply, claiming that Congress intended this aspect of the law to be optional. For six years, the Clinton/Gore administration has ignored this blatant violation of civil rights effecting thousands of low-income women.

Since the onset of the Clinton presidency NOW's once stalwart support of many women's rights issues has eroded. While reproductive rights are important, so is quality childcare, a living wage, eradication of environmental toxins, and health care. Although Clinton/Gore promised to address these issues in '92 and '96, no acceptable plans for improvement have been implemented. Why is NOW so willing to give Gore another chance? Oh yeah, I forgot, for abortion rights. Ireland also charged Nader with "an ignorance [of women's issues] that's almost willful?" Has she read Why Women Pay More, researched and published by Nader's consumer advocate group? Does she understand how Nader's support of labor and trade unions help hundreds of thousands of women? NOW has never forgiven Nader for his 1996 comment that he was not interested "in gonadal politics." While I agree he could have phrased his remark better, his point was that gender should not matter; working toward the goal of a deep democracy benefiting all Americans, regardless of gender, used to be a goal NOW supported. Perhaps the proof that Nader means what he says is apparent in his choice of Winona LaDuke for his vice-presidential running mate. A Native American, mother of three, Harvard economist, and champion of ecological rights, LaDuke has not received a single word of praise from NOW. While LaDuke's accomplishments in the name of women's rights grow daily, NOW is silent. Maybe they are just too tired from their "paternalistic" bullying of women into voting for their barely salable candidate. What is Roe vs. Wade worth to you, NOW? If it means the wholesale sellout of a constituency you once pledged to serve then you are on the right track. If Gore wins because you've browbeaten enough women away from voting for Nader, then you can enjoy the power that comes with being co-opted by the system. Fortunately, there are still feminists, like the ones who will march on the Mall this month, who want to help women, children and families navigate the minefield of "politics as usual". CP

Ellen Johnson, of Phoenix, is an organizer of Arizona Greens who also teaches at ASU.

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CounterPunch on the Stump

View from the Road

In these final weeks of Campaign 2000 we CounterPunch editors have been criss-crossing the country with our book on Al Gore (quick! call 1-800-840-3683 and have a copy rushed to you, $19.50 S/H included). We've talked at book stores from Seattle, Washington to Brattleboro, Vermont, college campuses from the University of Washington to the University of Maryland, from the courthouse steps in Ukiah to the Judson Church in New York. We've had the pleasure of meeting scores of CounterPunchers. In the course of these travels we've been in many debates.

On October 16, we went to a debate at the Hothouse in downtown Chicago, a great club featuring good music and political events. Here were ranged advocates of the Nader/Green third party bid against Democratic loyalists. We heard an organizer from the UE put up a strong argument as to why labor should rethink its loyalty to the Democrats. He pointed out that at the stroke of a pen Clinton could have helped labor immensely by any number of executive orders. No such orders came. When the shipworkers at Avondale were battling their employers, Clinton/Gore could have exercised some muscle for the union since the federal government was the yard's prime customer. Not such muscle was exerted. After eight long years there's been nothing on striker replacement.

Despite all the bright talk of New Labor, unions have actually lost ground in the Clinton-Gore years, simply because the legal playing field is so tilted in favor of the employers. There's no prospect on earth that a Gore-Lieberman administration would work to slant this playing field the other way. Back in 1993 and 1994 when Democrats held the White House and Congress, what did Clinton-Gore do for labor? They pushed through NAFTA.

The most arrogant sounds that night in the Hothouse came out of the mouth of James Weinstein, owner of In This Times, who has been filling his pages with Gore apologias from the likes of Carl Pope, executive director of the Sierra Club. Weinstein dismissed the Nader/Green challenge as a naïve exercise in futility by political romantics who would soon relapse into torpor after their brief quadrennial upsurge. To which we were tempted to point out that most conspicuous form of quadrennial activity is from people like Weinstein, who awaken from their long doze every four years to call for loyalty to the Democratic ticket. The one thing you can say about Naderites and active greens is that they work for their causes, month after month, year after year.

Just like In These Times, the Nation has been sounding the tocsin for Gore. We're not sure what the magazine will do by way of formal endorsement but it's clear that the magazine that endorsed Jesse Jackson in 1988 is now on the side of the man who put the most vicious slanders against Jackson that year. In the October 16 edition of The Nation, Eric Alterman huffed and puffed for more than 7,000 words, straining to prove the unprovable: namely, that the policy gulf dividing Bush from Gore is profound and that the election of Gore will save the country from a nosedive into fascism. Alterman's harangue was preceeded by an entire issue of The Nation devoted to scaremongering about the threat Bush poses to a "delicately balanced" Supreme Court. Both are part of The Nation's increasingly shrill project to intimidate potential Nader voters into crawling into the Gore camp.

Alterman cranks out three arguments for electing Gore: executive orders, the veto and the courts. All of these are cast in the negative. In other words, it's not that Gore is good on any issue the Left cares about. It's just that Bush would be worse. Much worse, Alterman trembles. The evidence he marshals forth is not compelling.

On matters of sexual politics, Alterman suggests that Gore is a real hero and that Bush is a villain who is itching to overturn Roe v. Wade and attack gays. There's not much substance to these charges. Even Susan Estrich, Dukakis's former campaign manager, writing in an earlier edition of the Nation, predicts that Bush won't seek to overturn Roe.

In fact abortion is already beyond the effective reach of many women in this country and Gore is most certainly among those to blame for this state of affairs. Unsurprisingly, Alterman sidesteps Gore's own record on abortion. During his congressional career, Gore had an 84 percent pro-Life record, backing several versions of the Hyde amendment and the even more obnoxious Siljander amendment, which defined life as beginning at conception. Gore voted against federal funding of abortions for poor women and wrote to constituents in Tennessee that he believed abortion was "immoral". You think this guy is someone to rely on? On gays, Alterman conjures up an image of Bush as a vengeful homophobe. But his running mate Dick Cheney, whose daughter Mary is a lesbian, has laid out a libertarian attitude toward gay rights that must make Pat Robertson and James Dobson cringe. Contrast this to Gore, whose record on gay issues is abysmal. During his first campaign in 1976, Gore denounced gays as engaging in "abnormal" sexual conduct. Later, he publicly vowed not to take money from gay groups and he joined with Jesse Helms in voting for a string of anti-gay measures in the senate.

Since the election of Clinton and Gore, industrial jobs have continued to flee the country, in large measure due to the more than 200 trade pacts brokered since 1993. Alterman doesn't mention NAFTA, GATT, the China deal or the African trade agreement. He merely shrugs that "as important as trade policy is...it remains an uncomfortable stretch to insist that it somehow trumps everything else put together". Of course, there's not much else on the other side of the table. What NAFTA and GATT haven't done to working folk, Gore's Reinventing Government (REGO)scheme, which also goes unmentioned, has. Among other onslaughts on working people, Gore's

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Reinvention "privatized or simply axed about 360,000 federal jobs, way beyond the wildest hopes of either Reagan or George H. Bush. Take the National Labor Relations Board, which Alterman suggests would be gutted by Bush. Alterman is looking at the wrong calendar. Gore has already beat Bush to it. REGO slashed the NLRB staff and budget by more than 30 percent.

Affirmative action? Another reason to back Gore over Bush, Alterman says. But he carefully overlooks the fact, as reported by Alterman's pal George Stephanopoulos, that Gore tried to use REGO as a way to end affirmative action guidelines for federal contracts. He failed, barely. But his REGO schemes, by jettisoning merit pay systems, did end up hurting minority federal workers to such an extent that Blacks in Government, a group of African-American civil service employees, referred to it as "economic genocide".

Take the military. "On missile defense, Gore's most appalling cave-in to right-wing hysteria, the Vice President cravenly favors 'developing the technology for a national missile defense system to protect against ballistic-missile attacks from rogue states,'" Alterman writes. "But Bush says he would deploy a much more extensive defense right away, whether it works or not." Actually, Gore supports a portable missile defense system that can be shipped off to the Middle East or the Straits of Taiwan. In other words, the system would be designed to be used as part of Gore's "forward engagement" military strategy, a gameplan for accelerated interventionism. Bush's plan is nuttier, but less malign. He talks about a global missile defense system that would be shared with Russian and even China. And it goes hand in hand with Bush's plan to unilaterally dismantle a large stockpile of nuclear missiles. Star Wars, which has been going strong through administrations stretching back to the early 1960s, will never work. If Republicans, for whom the whole mad enterprise has become an article of quasi-religious faith, use it as a rationale for cuts in weapons that represent as greater threat, why spurn the bargain. Every time a Star Wars test shot goes awry, it sinks the Pentagon yet further into welcome disrepute.

Alterman ignores Gore's own attack on the Bush plan as being too risky and "destabilizing." Gore doesn't want to disarm, he wants to fund a new generation of "more efficient" nuclear missiles. This is a replay of Gore's scheme in the early 1980s to sell the Reagan administration on the Midgetman missile.

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Alterman weirdly asserts that Gore's backing of Star Wars represents "his most appalling cave-in to the rightwing". To our knowledge, the Star Wars scheme is typical defense porkbarrel, the kind of big ticket handout that has always enjoyed bipartisan backing in Washington. It would be tough to pick Gore's worst act as a politician, but a top five list might look something like this: the dismantling of welfare; the expansion of the federal death penalty; the assault on habeas corpus; the bombing of Yugoslavia; the genocidal sanctions against Iraq that have starved and killed more than one million children. Nothing from Alterman on such matters.

Alterman resurrects that old canard that liberal presidents (read any Democrat) give legitimacy to progressive causes. This is top-down thinking of the most frigid kind and it is devastatingly wrong. The Democratic Party can more accurately be defined as the graveyard of social movements.(Alterman, like Gore, skipped Seattle.) Progressive causes are infused with legitimacy by the power of popular movements, not by the liberality or graciousness of leaders. An elitist like Alterman can't suppress his excitement over the very notion of the executive office, as if he were part of the parlor cabinet in the court of the Sun King. Alterman's prose becomes moist with excitement about the president's "awesome abilitity to make things happen just by saying so", as if the President were a medieval king who could cure scrofula with a touch of his hand. Who but Clinton, Alterman effuses, would have awarded John Kenneth Galbraith and George McGovern the presidential medal of freedom? We're pretty sure that Galbraith and McGovern, both loyal Democrats, are behind Gore/Lieberman, but both men also have a fine sense of irony. We think that they would be highly amused by the idea that the quality of executive power in America can be assayed by the recipients of presidential medals. CP

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